



Learning to Care

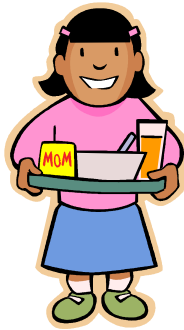
When should children learn caring behaviors? The earlier, the better! Even very young children can be taught the building blocks of caring.

What is caring? CHARACTER COUNTS!

defines caring as:

- Being kind
- Being compassionate and *showing* care
- Expressing gratitude
- Forgiving others
- Helping people in need

Source: www.charactercounts.org



How do young children learn caring behaviors? Preschool age children are developing socially and emotionally. For them to learn caring behaviors, they must have opportunities to practice and experience kindness. They are eager to learn, and do so through play and imitation.

With *proper adult guidance*, there are many ways children learn caring and kindness.

- **Modeling kindness** - Adults show kids how to be caring by being kind, helpful, forgiving, and showing compassion to others. Children model adult behaviors they see.
- **Caring for animals** – Pets require water, food and clean environments. Children can learn valuable lessons by caring for animals.

- **Caring for younger children** - Even simple tasks like gathering diapers and clothes or singing to a younger sibling can help children learn kindness and caring.
- **Gardening** – Nurturing plants helps children learn about the wonders of nature and caring. If you don't have space for a garden, a small window planter works well.
- **Reading books** - Children's books are a wonderful way to introduce and reinforce caring and kindness. A good book to read and discuss with preschoolers is *The Little Engine That Could*, by Watty Piper.
- **Creating gifts and cards** - Young children can learn to show appreciation to others by making thank-you gifts or cards.
- **Playing make believe** - Preschool children enjoy make believe play. By playing house, doctor, and police officer, they can practice caring and nurturing behaviors.

When you match your expectations to their abilities, encourage and approve their efforts, and allow plenty of time for learning, you can give young children opportunities to learn caring.

The more that adults show kindness, acceptance and compassionate and caring behaviors, the more likely the children around them will, too.

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